

WHAT ARE GENERAL RECORDS SCHEDULES?

General Records Schedules (GRS) provide mandatory disposal authorization for temporary administrative records common to several or all Federal agencies. The GRS are issued by the Archivist of the United States and include records relating to civilian personnel, fiscal accounting, procurement, communications, printing, and other common functions.

WHAT IS AN AGENCY SCHEDULE?

Agencies develop records schedules for all records not covered by the GRS. The schedules contain descriptions of record series or systems and disposition instructions for each. These instructions specify when the series are to be cut off, when eligible records are to be moved to off-site storage, when eligible temporary records must be destroyed or deleted, and when permanent records are to



be transferred to the National Archives. Schedules must be approved by the Archivist of the United States. Once approved by the Archivist, retention periods in the schedule are mandatory.

WHY HAVE RECORDS SCHEDULES?

- In addition to being required by law, there are a number of practical benefits of using records schedules. They:
- Ensure that important records are organized and maintained in such a way so to be easily retrieved and identifiable as evidence of the program's activities
 - Conserve office space and equipment by using filing cabinets to store only active paper records
 - Save money by moving inactive files to off-site storage areas until they are ready for disposition
 - Help preserve those records that are valuable for historical or other research purposes, and
 - Control the growth of records in offices through the systematic disposition of unneeded records.

10 REASONS TO HAVE A RECORDS MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

- To facilitate easy and timely access to necessary information
- To control the creation and growth of records
- To reduce operating costs
- To improve efficiency and productivity
- To assimilate new records management technologies
- To ensure regulatory compliance
- To minimize litigation risks
- To safeguard vital information
- To support better management decision making
- To preserve the corporate memory

10 WAYS TO IMPROVE RECORDS MANAGEMENT

- Make employees responsible for appropriate record keeping and put that responsibility in performance standards
- Identify the documents needed to keep for each function performed
- Designate a record copy of each document, deliverable, product, or other record and keep it in an official file
- File records according to the office file plan
- Break files at the end of each year and start new files
- File reference materials separately from official records
- File on a regular basis
- Hold records clean-up days at least once a year
- Retire inactive records to appropriate storage
- Maintain an inventory of the records maintained and where they are located

IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS OR WANT MORE INFORMATION ABOUT RECORDS MANAGEMENT CONTACT THE INDIAN AFFAIRS RECORDS MANAGEMENT PROGRAM
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AN EMPLOYEE'S
QUICK GUIDE
TO RECORDS
MANAGEMENT

On the Record with
the Indian Affairs Records
Management
Program



Bureau of Indian Affairs

RECORDS MANAGEMENT. WHAT IS IT? AND, WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

If you create a document using a word processor, enter information into a database, file a document in a folder, answer an inquiry from the public, respond to a FOIA request, or do anything else that documents your activities on the job, you are a records custodian. You are responsible for ensuring the safety, timely availability, and proper retention or transfer of information in your custody.

There are rules governing the use and destruction of all Federal records. And, there are legal implications for destroying records without the proper authority. Following good records management practices can help you fulfill your responsibilities and can benefit your office in many other ways as well.



WHAT IS RECORDS MANAGEMENT?

Records management addresses the life cycle of records. Meaning, the period of time that records are in the custody of Federal agencies. The life cycle consists of three stages:

- Creation or receipt
- Maintenance and use, and
- Disposition

WHY HAVE RECORDS MANAGEMENT?

Records management allows Federal agencies to manage organizational information so that it is timely, accurate, cost-effective, accessible, and useable--better information, at the right time, makes better business.

WHAT ARE FEDERAL EMPLOYEE RESPONSIBILITIES?

Federal Employees are responsible for making and keeping records of their work by:

- Creating records needed to do their business,

recording decisions and actions taken, and documenting their activities;

- Safeguarding records so that information can be found when needed; and
- Disposing of records in accordance with established agency schedules and Federal regulations.

WHAT ARE FEDERAL AGENCY RESPONSIBILITIES?

Agency heads are required to:

- Make and preserve records that contain adequate and proper documentation of the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, and essential transactions of the agency
- Establish and maintain an active, continuing program for the economical and efficient management of agency records, and
- Establish safeguards against the removal or loss of records.



WHO IS RESONSIBLE FOR RECORDS MANAGEMENT?

Federal oversight responsibilities are divided between the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) and the General Services Administration (GSA). NARA is responsible for adequacy of documentation and records disposition and GSA is responsible for economy and efficiency in records management.

WHAT IS A RECORD?

Records include all books, papers, photographs, machine readable materials, or other documentary materials, regardless of physical form or characteristics, made or received by an agency of the United States government under Federal law or in connection with the transaction of public business and preserved or appropriate for preservation by the agency or its legitimate successor as evidence of the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations, or other activities of the government or because of the informational value in them.

Records exist in many different formats in addition to paper documents--for example, working files, drafts, e-mail messages, data and spreadsheets, computer output, data from test equipment, results of computer modeling, videos, maps architectural drawings, and microform. The definition of a record must be applied to all such documentary materials to determine if they are records. And, records include both final products and documentation supporting the decision trails.

WHAT ARE VITAL RECORDS?

Vital records are those records that are essential to keep the agency operational during and following an emergency or a disaster.

If the answer is "yes" to any one of the following questions, it is a vital record:

- Does the record serve a critical function?



- Is the record specifically listed in the continuity of operations plan?
- Does the record contain legal or financial rights information?

Vital records must be included in a written inventory that identifies the office responsible for the records series, the title of the records series or the information system that contains vital information, the medium on which the records are recorded, the physical location for off-site storage of copies of the records series or system, and the frequency with which the records are to be updated. (IARM will be issuing additional guidance.)

WHAT IS A RECORDS SERIES?

A series is the basic unit for organizing and controlling files. It is a group of files or documents kept together because they relate to a particular subject or function, result from the same activity, document a specific type of transaction, take a particular physical form, or have some other relationship arising out of their creation, receipt, maintenance, or use.

Each records series must be scheduled for appropriate retention and disposition.

WHAT DOES DISPOSITION MEAN?

Disposition refers to the action taken by a Federal agency with regard to records that are no longer needed for current government business. It is a comprehensive term that includes both destruction and transfer of Federal records to NARA. The disposition of both temporary and permanent records requires the prior approval of the Archivist of the United States.

WHAT ARE PERMANENT RECORDS?

Permanent records are those records that have been determined by the Archivist of the United States to be so valuable or unique in documenting the history of the agency or for information content that they should be preserved "forever" as part of the National Archives of the United States.



WHAT ARE TEMPORARY RECORDS?

Temporary records are those records that have been determined by the Archivist of the United States to be incidental to the performance of the agency mission. They are "operational," "support," and "service" type records, of temporary value to the agency, that will be destroyed at some time.

WHAT IS A RECORDS SCHEDULE?

A records schedule provides mandatory instructions for what to do with records (and non-record materials) no longer needed for current government business. Schedules provide instructions for the retention, disposition, and systematic removal of unneeded records from offices. All records must be scheduled either by an agency schedule or a General Records Schedule (GRS).